

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

Hearing on Operation Iraqi Freedom: Lessons Learned

I want to welcome Admiral Giambastiani, Commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command, to the Committee this morning. A submariner by profession, the Admiral is one of our most forward-thinking military officers. We are fortunate to have him here to today to discuss lessons the military is learning from our recent experience in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

There's a popular saying that Generals always prepare to re-fight the last war. U.S. Joint Forces Command is charged with making sure that we're experimenting with new ways of winning the next war. In accomplishing that mission, the command paid close attention to the conduct of Operation Iraqi Freedom in order to thoroughly assess the war's implications for future defense policies and programs.

To its credit, the Defense Department put the process in motion before the first bombs fell. It knew that some things would go well and some things would go poorly. That's the nature of war. The Secretary moved to make sure that we captured all of those lessons in real time as objectively as possible. JFCOM embedded teams of analysts with the forces doing the fighting in order to bridge the gap between the real-world experience of troops on the ground and the abstract, theoretical concepts of scholars working from an ivory tower. We didn't do that in Grenada, Panama, Desert Storm, or Kosovo.

The Department's approach signified a remarkable openness to self-assessment and recognized that criticism of OIF needed to be based on a realistic assessment of the facts on the ground—not on the impressions created by reporters who are paid to make headlines, talking heads who are paid to talk—whether they know anything or not—or critics with their own axes to grind. I think that's a lesson worth remembering as we review the ongoing war on terror.

The Admiral and his team have had an opportunity to brief some of us in a classified setting. But, it's important that JFCOM's efforts reach a wider audience so that we are better able to assess and incorporate the lessons—and non-lessons—of Operation Iraqi Freedom in our Congressional responsibilities. Should it prove necessary to meet in closed session, the committee will move to room 2212, which has been prepared for that possibility.

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